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Abstract

This article considers an alternative way of conceptualising integrated learning through an ecological lens. Against rapidly changing global landscapes, the complexities of contextual variables have led to different interpretations of CLIL, which raise constant questions about the nature of its pedagogic and linguistic demands and the quality of learning outcomes. CLIL holds a pivotal position for reframing its potential as a pedagogic rather than a linguistic phenomenon within the (plurilingual) education agenda. Focussing on 3 fundamental strands i.e., language, literacies and learning, an emerging pluriliteracies approach to teaching for deeper learning is presented. This approach not only maps out *how* content and language are interrelated but also recognizes conditions supporting learner self-efficacy and teacher mentoring of student learning that prioritize pedagogic principles to guide classroom practice. The potential for CLIL as a contributor to sustaining deeper learning, suggests it may have a significant role in moving pedagogic thinking forwards – beyond bilingual classrooms.

1. Introduction

Having reviewed many articles over a significant period of time which focus on a multitude of perspectives on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), 3 points continually emerge: implications of dynamic conceptualisations of CLIL in different contexts; the quality of learning processes and outcomes; and the need for evidence – especially longitudinal studies – which offer insights into successful learning in practice. The first of these immediately presents a challenge. A fundamental principle of CLIL open to wide interpretation, is the promotion of *integrated learning,* where the vehicular language used to learn curriculum subjects or undertake projects, tasks and thematic studies, is not the first language of learners, and where that language is also the focus of learning. Although CLIL grew out of a European movement in the 1990s, the acronym is not used consistently across national boundaries. Integrated learning is also referred to as bilingual education, immersion education, interdisciplinary learning and so on, according to contextual variables and preferences in specific countries.

It is increasingly accepted that CLIL as an umbrella term involves a wide range of second or additional language contexts in education. This signifies a shift from the early stages of bringing together content teaching and language learning/using where, in many instances, a subject teacher taught a curricular subject through the medium of another European language. A growing emphasis on principles and practices which integrate content and language learning has uncovered its

complexity and identified a growing need to address the implications for individual and collaborative knowledge construction and meaning-making across languages. This requires all those involved with learning and teaching to take an active and critical stance, to share what successful learning looks like and to understand the principles and conditions which enable deeper learning to develop. Whilst early CLIL studies suggested generally positive outcomes, more recent research identifies concerns about learning outcomes linked to contextual and pedagogic variables which impact on classroom practices (e.g. Bruton, 2013; Dalton-Puffer; & Vollmer, 2008). Moreover, a rapidly moving global landscape involving socio-cultural, economic, technological, and political phenomena means that classrooms have irreversibly changed in terms of the nature of learners, their linguistic profiles, and cultural roots. In addition, the realization of the critical role of literacies in integrated learning (CLIL) suggests that the interdependent roles played by language and literacies are fundamental to learning and to improving the quality of plurilingual education for learners.

In this article, I offer an alternative way of envisioning what can currently be described as CLIL which eschews labels, acronyms, and debates about whether or not CLIL is a variant of immersion, content-based instruction, bilingual education, task-based learning and so on. Distinctions and convergences concerning interpretations of CLIL have already been well-argued in the literature (e.g. Coyle, 2007; Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter, 2013; Dalton-Puffer, LLinares, Lorenzo & Nikula, 2014; Garcia, 2009; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010). Instead, I take an educational linguistic and pedagogic perspective, which openly situates my own thinking. It acknowledges the need to take account of context-specific exigencies but focuses on current and future thinking for equitable and quality learning based on 'organic pedagogic practice' (Sardovnik, 2001, p. 689).

2. A 'tricky business'

Almost 3 decades ago, Cazden and Snow (1990) described bilingual education as "a simple label for a complex phenomenon." Garcia (2009) noted at least 33 different designations for bilingual education – including multilingual education – often used synonymously. Aligned with European policies, 'multilingualism' is taken to mean the coexistence of several languages within a given social group; 'plurilingualism' to mean the use of several languages by an individual. In terms of understanding CLIL, Cenoz et al. (2013) concluded that:

> Our examination of the definition and scope of the term CLIL both internally, as used by CLIL advocates in Europe, and externally, as compared with immersion education in and outside Europe, indicates that the core characteristics of CLIL are understood in different ways with

> respect to: the balance between language and content instruction, the nature of the target languages involved, instructional goals, defining characteristics of student participants, and pedagogical approaches to integrating language and content instruction (2013, p. 255).

This is not at all surprising, given the multiplicity of contextual differences and what Vertovec (2017, p.1024) referred to as 'super-diversity.' In response to Cenoz et al.'s suggestions for creating a taxonomy of different forms of CLIL and content-based instruction, Dalton- Puffer et al. (2014) made the point that:

> Classrooms the world over are full of people who, for different reasons are learning additional languages and/or are studying through languages that are not their first. Gaining insight into such contexts is complicated for researchers and practitioners alike by the myriad of contextual variables that come with the different implementations and make comparison and generalization a **tricky business** (2014, p. 213).

May (2014) welcomed the more recent focus on diversity because it provides a forum for taking a critical look at CLIL, the hybrid nature of learning, how it happens in (multilingual) classrooms and how it can contribute to improving learning from a holistic perspective. Taking a broad view, Garcia (2009) emphasised that bilingual education, including CLIL, is about much more than the acquisition and use of additional languages to support learning. She highlighted the need for learners to become "global and responsible citizens as they learn to function across cultures and worlds, that is beyond the cultural borders in which traditional schooling often operates" (2009, p. 6). Whilst many fundamental values underpinning educational systems across Europe are arguably 'shared' at the macro level, how these permeate policies, stakeholder involvement and practices leads to multiple interpretations and enactments of the kind of learning that 'happens' in classrooms at the micro level. Debates about, for example, which language/s should be used in the classroom or how instructional goals are assessed are meaningless if they are not considered alongside 'big questions' which demand transparency and lie at the interface of educational goals and the hybridity of classroom learning.

Bridging the gaps between political rhetoric and teacher discourse, between theoretical constructs and professional beliefs is a challenge, which does not depend on an established set of rules or pedagogic trends. I reason that by respectfully bringing together those different perspectives, ideas and experts **including learners** – it is possible to map out alternative pathways seeking to address difficult questions to support, design and evaluate dynamic stages of growth. In retrospect, many of the dominant debates in CLIL have limited thinking about the contribution of CLIL to broader

education, personal growth and deeper understanding. An ecological lens is increasingly used to make sense of how very different aspects of language(s) development *for* and *through* learning (Coyle et al., 2010) interconnect and impact at very different levels with other variables (e.g. Coyle, Meyer, Halbach & Schuck, 2018; Mühlhäusler, 2000; van Lier, 2010). These contextual demands and differences have to be factored into understanding and determining optimum conditions for learning which foreground language and languages (including the learner's first language) and impact on the quality of individual learning experiences. This is fundamental yet often overlooked and resonates with Byrnes' (2005) point that separating language (s) from learning is an illusion.

I would argue that any formal learning including CLIL can only be genuinely understood through an interconnected perspective on how the social and pedagogic interactions of participants, the nature of the relationships and behaviours which emerge and the co-design of learning impact on the quality of outcomes. So, what does this mean?

Whilst the rhetoric is not new, appropriate action to position CLIL as a key contributor to deeper learning in plurilingual settings remains less visible. I would suggest, therefore, that since CLIL straddles content learning and language learning, it holds a pivotal position for reframing its potential as a pedagogic rather than a linguistic phenomenon within the (plurilingual) education agenda. CLIL can serve as a catalyst for multi-perspectival analysis and debate, where different and sometimes conflicting fields can meet. As Nikula, Dafouz, Moore and Smit (2016) contended, in a volume dedicated entirely to 'integration,' rather than debating similarities and differences between diverse forms of bilingual education a focus on unravelling the complexity of what is meant by integrated learning. Integration lies at the heart of CLIL and is a ***shared concern*** for all forms of education including those that 'appear' to be predominantly monolingual.

An example of how *shared concerns* might develop into a transformative model for pluriliteracies learning is outlined in the next section. Such thinking goes beyond CLIL as an approach to learning which focuses on how content can be acquired through another language. Instead, the potential of CLIL as a transformative change agent starts by prioritising optimal deeper learning experiences for all learners through asking difficult questions. It does not suggest quick-fix solutions but that, by bringing together distinct fields (Becher& Trowler's 'academic tribes', 2001) with diverse practices (professional experts), interconnected synergies and interactions have the potential to lead to what Balsamo (2010, p. 430) refers to as 'knowledge ecology.'

3. Shared Concerns and Learning Ecologies for Plurilingual Learning

I draw briefly on 3 overarching distinct yet interrelated *shared concerns* about CLIL grouped together under the following headings: **language** (i.e., the languages of schooling, the nature of language as a learning tool and the principles which guide how these are learned and used); **literacies** (i.e., taking an inclusive and critical definition of academic literacy skills development beyond reading and writing in first and other languages); and **learning** (i.e., acknowledging the pressure to improve the quality of learning outcomes whilst striving for deep learning). Each of these 3 constructs is complex with an extensive literature and research base. It is far beyond the remit of this article to analyse each in detail – this has been done many times before. Instead I suggest that by constantly situating 'big questions' which involve plurilingual and monolingual leaners in different contexts and mapping pathways to explore adaptations, interpretations and implications *in situ,* dynamic ways of doing, knowing, being and working with others (UNESCO's 4 pillars), will emerge. That is, engaging in a growth cycle triggered by *shared concerns* involving collaborative and sometimes contentious processes of problematizing, theorizing, growing, practicing and realising (Coyle et al., 2018), may not only impact significantly on CLIL practices, but also has the potential to become in Hornberger's (2002, p. 27) words an 'ecological heuristic' which grows and elucidates thinking thereby placing CLIL in broader education contexts.

3.1 Language

Throughout the development of CLIL since the mid-1990s, especially in Europe, there has been an emphasis on the development of language competence (L2, L3) in classrooms where language learning (and using) happens simultaneously with the learning thematic or subject disciplines. Fuelled by increasing European interest in repositioning the role of language(s) in schooling as a holistic entity (Schleppegrell, 2004), *shared concerns* have more recently created potentially powerful opportunities for breaking down some of the barriers between language teachers, language-medium teachers and subject teachers. Bringing together the 'languages of schooling' such as modern languages, heritage languages, additional and second languages, mainstream languages and language-medium requires pedagogic rethinking and attention to a multi-layered theory-practice significance for learning. At the classroom level, increasingly teachers have to respond to political and societal demands for 'raising attainment' taking account of rapid demographic shifts in linguistic and cultural identities. In some specific contexts, a lack of motivation towards language learning *per se* presents particular challenges, whereas in others, influxes of children without prior language competence in the mainstream language require specific approaches to encourage rapid language acquisition. Quite simply the landscape is dynamic and the rate of change is rapid.

In CLIL classrooms where teachers are subject specialists, progressing academic language may be limited to focussing on, for example, scientific vocabulary and key phrases, without opportunities for learners to develop more sophisticated academic language i.e. language *for* and *through* learning. When CLIL teachers are more language-oriented translation, code switching grammar exercises are common features. Such scenarios are familiar as is the call for teachers to collaborate better. However, I would argue that whilst the concept of the languages of schooling opens up alternative avenues for discussion, collaboration between teachers or between researchers is not enough.

The 'territories' or theories rooted in traditions of and approaches to second language acquisition, bilingualism, teaching English as a second language, communicative teaching of languages (usually English), and grammar-based approaches to modern or foreign language learning to name but a few, have remained relatively bounded. For example, the debate concerning a focus on form (grammar) or function (meaning) suggests that the balance or 'counter-balance' depends on the purpose or goals of learning (Lyster, 2014; Swain, 2006). Unpicking what language means in CLIL contexts, understanding what language needs to **do** to support concept formation has not been systematically analysed by CLIL teachers and learners. Do we really know how to design environments which enable learners to access the kind of language they need to progress and deepen their learning? Are the inherent cognitive, social, psychological and linguistic processes understood and made transparent by and for participants? Such questions are fundamental to all classrooms – language as well as subject learning. These questions cannot be adequately addressed without transparent reference to the processes themselves which cut across principles of how individuals use language to learn and how to manipulate tools at their disposal – see for example cognitive discourse functions (see 3.2).

The interface between the goals of education and the way we conceptualise learning will continue to remain fuzzy unless the ways in which language determines the depth of learning is not only understood but activated through tasks and activities designed by teachers and learners. To bring about sustainable changes to classroom practices requires 'connecting' different fields and perspectives. May's (2014) 'multilingual turn' notes that as the social, cultural and multilingual composition of learners in schools is changing, those boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred.

Llinares, Whittaker & Morton's (2012) work on the role of language(s) in CLIL made a strong case for bringing together systemic functional linguistics and socio-cultural theory to provide clearer guidance at a theoretical level. Unless subject teachers and language teachers ask difficult questions and grow new ways of understanding how language impacts on learning (including when the language itself is the object of learning), language learned and used in the classroom will not lead to

deeper learning. Zwiers (2007) contended that the role of language development in subject learning is poorly understood regardless of the language medium. Questions such as 'what do we want our learners to know and do?' and 'what does behaving like a scientist, a geographer or a linguist really mean?' are fundamental. These questions will be revisited in a subsequent section.

3.2 (Pluri)literacies

> If all students are to learn effectively, they must become literate to learn in different areas of the curriculum across the phases of learning…. If these literacy demands are left implicit and not taught explicitly they provide barriers to learning (Queensland Government, Department of Education and Arts, p. 4).

A growing emphasis across nations on 'literacies' across the curriculum (EU Report, 2012) features in global trends and comparisons such as PISA (programme for international student assessment) and impacts significantly on pedagogic priorities. Both scientific and mathematical literacies in L1 feature as a global comparator (PISA) have led to renewed interest in academic literacies alongside an increasingly urgent emphasis on digital literacies in L1.

Shanahan and Shanahan's (2008) work on literacy development in L1 drew attention to the need to enable learners to progress from basic and intermediate levels to disciplinary literacy requiring **explicit** teaching. If knowledge pathways are made up of constructing different kinds of knowledge (factual, procedural, conceptual and strategic) operationalised and developed through 4 subject-specific activity domains - doing, organising, explaining and arguing (Polias 2016), then in order to 'grow' and deepen knowledge and understanding, learners will need language which is very different from de-contextualised grammatical chronology.

In bilingual education, the fields of literacy and bilingualism represent vast amounts of literature (Hornberger, 2003, p. 4), yet there remains a disconnect between traditional literacies practices which focus on developing reading and writing skills in L1 and those which increasingly take account of literacy skills in other languages and across more advanced learning of different subjects. For example, the multiliteracies approach developed by the New London Group (1996) and elaborated by numerous researchers (e.g., Alexander, 2008; Gee, 2008; Hibbert, 2013) took into account multimodality involving multiple modes of meaning-making and communication (e.g., audio, visual, linguistic, spatial, performative). Subsequent alternative principles and practices to support students in optimising their language and literacy learning across languages emerged. Seminal work on biliteracies by researchers (e.g. Garcia, Bartlet & Kleifgen, 2007; Hornberger, 2002), including translanguaging practices, responded to increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, underlining the

importance of plurilingualism and L1 use in the classroom. Whilst the focus on literacy development in mainstream classrooms has increasingly had to accommodate those learners whose first language is not the language of instruction, research suggests that CLIL does not transparently support subject literacies. Huettner and Smit (2014, p. 165) noted that literacies development has not involved CLIL, especially in terms of "its ability to [develop]…disciplines or subject-specific language and genre proficiency."

A clear need to focus on specific literacies which enable learners to acquire thinking, concepts, and skills fundamental to different disciplines is a priority. Moreover, expressing different types of knowledge with increasing levels of sophistication, i.e., deeper learning, will require 'languaging' learning which is critical yet rarely practiced in L1- or L2-medium classrooms. Dalton-Puffer (2013) identified different kinds of language functions which are necessary for learners to master discipline learning by externalizing cognitive processes (e.g. negotiating, naming, describing, reporting/narrating, explaining, arguing, evaluating and modelling). As such, these cognitive discourse functions need to be normalised into classroom processes, not as language functions to be learned as a decontextualized means of communicating, but as transparent links between meaning-making, using academic language and deepening that understanding. This requires enabling learners to language their learning in increasingly appropriate and sophisticated ways. However, according to Lyster (2014), teachers do not necessarily have the understanding and the tools to do this due to limited support and guidance in the application of cognitive, linguistic and symbolic resources by all teachers.

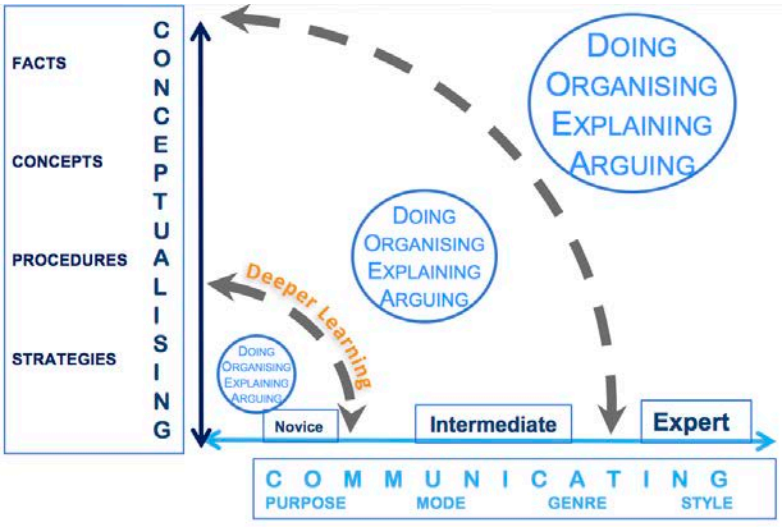

Figure 1. Mapping knowledge building (content) and linguistic progression

Given the emphasis on the role of language as the medium of learning as well as the object of learning, figure 1 outlines the Graz Group's a model which seeks to map out how knowledge building and conceptual development (conceptualising continuum) and the language needed (communicating continuum) interconnect in order to strengthen academic literacies, (Coyle, Meyer, Halbach & Schuck, 2017). Inspired by Mohan's Knowledge Framework and influenced by systemic functional linguistics and recent critical work on literacies development, the key to bridging subject and academic literacies (content and language) points to prioritising the role of cognitive discourse functions in academic literacy development for deeper learning. This will be further analysed.

3.3 Learning

The concept of deeper learning has recently gained momentum. Deep learning can be defined as the successful **internalization** of conceptual content knowledge (meaning making) and the **automatization** of subject specific procedures, skills and strategies which depend on learner acquisition of disciplinary literacies. "It is the process of meaning-making and shaping knowledge and experience through language. It is part of what constitutes learning" (Swain 2006, p. 98). As stated previously, however, the depth and breadth of conceptual knowledge needs to be languaged, needs to be owned by learners before it is internalised and before transfer of that understanding can be applied to other situations. Transfer cannot be taught as such. Instead, it is triggered through deepening academic progression which emerges through pathways for learning. Moving along these pathways will depend on the appropriate use of cognitive discourse functions. It is here that transparent task sequencing is crucial. The 'doing' phase involves meaning-making which is conceptualised and progressed by learners using their own words with increasing appropriacy (verbal phase). This is the argument underpinning the need for students to engage in languaging if they are to move towards abstraction (the cognitive and metacognitive phase) and create the cognitive patterns which facilitate transfer. Emergent questions relating to phases in cognitive and metacognitive development include: "What do I want my students to know? How do I know (and they know) that what they know is at an appropriate depth and breadth?"

Earlier in the article I referred to the ecological lens. What becomes clear when focusing on *shared concerns* is that they all interconnect. It is not possible to consider language without exploring its interrelationship with knowledge building and academic literacies. Similarly, when asking difficult questions about learning it is not possible to disassociate the cognitive and linguistic elements of learning from the socio-cultural and affective elements. With this in mind, an emergent integrated model has emerged which seeks to promote learner growth and progression for deeper learning, but

from a holistic perspective, where the learner's role and attributes alongside those of the teacher are inherent. In essence, the model below indicates that learner engagement and teacher guidance/mentoring have to be included as components of pluriliteracies (Meyer, Imhof, Coyle, & Banerjee, 2018).

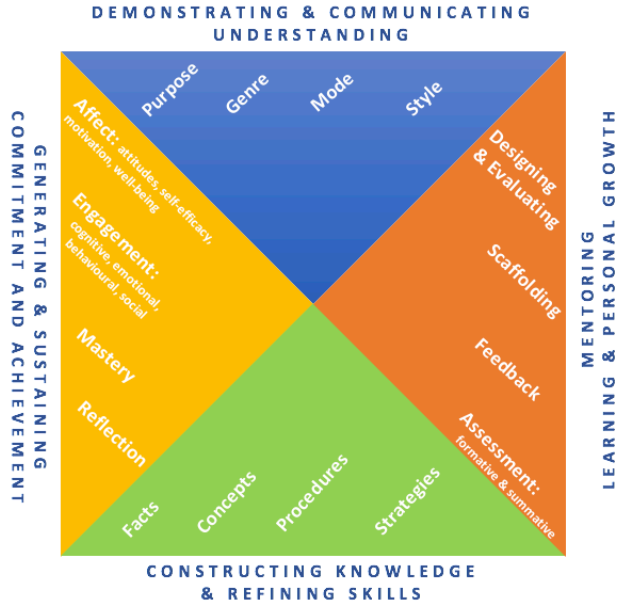

Figure 2. A holistic emerging model for Pluriliteracies Teaching for Deeper Learning

Whilst currently classroom evidence is being collected to support the Pluriliteracies Model for Teaching Deeper Learning (PTDL), a crucial point to make is that conceptualising knowledge ecology grew out of multi-level, multi- perspectival co-working by researchers, educators and classroom teachers. This growth continues.

4. Opportunities and Challenges

It is not within the remit of this article to detail the implications of refining and adapting this model. However, it serves to illustrate how the challenges of CLIL can provide opportunities for discussion which can lead to tangible and practical outcomes. Considering CLIL as a change agent with **potential** to transform classroom learning in bilingual classrooms as well as first language classrooms is a radical step. However, I do not believe this to be over-stated. This position has grown out of carefully listening to and engaging with *shared concerns* over several decades set within shifting contexts. We know that plurilingual learning is complex, fluid and contextually hybrid. We know that integrated learning has not only to focus on language and content but on plurilingual **learning** including the growth of learner-teacher partnerships (plurilingual here also includes apparently

monolingual classrooms which will need to shift towards plurlingualism). We also know that as educators we have to take a critical view of what successful learning looks like in the broadest sense in the 'here and now' by unpicking and collectively facing up to the difficult questions. In particular, I would emphasise the following as needing urgent action:

- Working in multi-level teams for transdisciplinary learning and research;
- Asking difficult questions which grow from *shared concerns;*
- Translating practices into principles and theories into professional understanding;
- Exploring how successful conditions for deeper learning evolve through the co-design of learning by teachers and learners;
- Identifying and acting upon the challenges and opportunities ahead if CLIL is realise its potential as an ecological pluriliteracies move towards sustaining deeper learning.
- Carrying out robust longitudinal empirical research into classroom practices.

When challenges are reframed as opportunities, CLIL as a change agent is significant. Based on an ecological model for sustaining deeper learning, the role of CLIL can be seen as contributing to moving pedagogic thinking onwards – beyond bilingual classrooms.

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